

# St Vincent & the Grenadines

Just the name St Vincent and the Grenadines evokes an emotive response with visions of exotic, idyllic island life. And the fantasy rings true. Imagine an island chain buried deep within the Caribbean Sea, uncluttered by tourist exploitation; white sand beaches on deserted islands, sky-blue water gently lapping the shore and barely a soul around.

Thirty-two islands dot the seascape, all vying to one-up each other in terms of tranquility. St Vincent is the largest in the group, home to the capital, Kingstown. This lively town is a throwback to colonial times with cobblestone streets and locals rushing about.

Once you get off the big island and into the Grenadines, everything changes. Gone is the traffic, the hustle and the pavement. All you're left with is a smattering of tiny islands waiting to be explored. Beaches stretch out before you, the pace of life slows to a crawl and the desire to go home vanishes.

You'll find unassuming budget hideaways, where you can escape from the world and (almost) live like a king on the income of a pauper. Or you can spend time on the island of Mustique where renting a house for the week will cost more than buying a luxury car.

These islands have enchanted sailors for centuries, and continue to do so. Whether you have your own vessel or are happy to hitch a ride, the island-hopping opportunities are irresistible. These islands were once the realm of real pirates but now they are the stomping grounds of the *Pirates of the Caribbean*. St Vincent and the Grenadines have jumped into the limelight thanks to Hollywood and they're not looking back.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 150 sq miles
- **Capital** Kingstown
- **Country code** ☎ 784
- **Departure tax** EC\$40
- **Famous for** Deserted islands, yachting, *Pirates of the Caribbean* – and real pirates, too.
- **Language** English, French patois (increasingly rare)
- **Money** Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$); EC\$1 = US\$0.38 = €0.24 = UK£0.19
- **Official name** St Vincent and the Grenadines
- **People** Vincentians (formal), Vincys (colloquial)
- **Phrase** Check it? (Do you follow me?)
- **Population** 118,000
- **Visa** No visa required; see p672



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Tobago Cays** (p669) Visit the jewel of the Caribbean – these picture perfect islands are the essential SVG experience
- **Canouan** (p665) Check out the undeveloped half of this picturesque island, before it's too late
- **Kingstown** (p654) Hardwire yourself into the local scene, cruise the cobblestone streets of SVG's biggest city
- **Mustique** (p664) If you've got more dollars than sense, kick up your heels with rock stars and drop more coin than the GDP
- **Island-Hopping** (p661) Cruise the ocean, vagabond around the islands, find your own perfect beach or untouched bay and play pirate

## ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a day or two in St Vincent, exploring the busy streets. Then head south and get ready to relax. Take the boat to Bequia and settle into the beach life. Go for a wander, if the mood takes you, and compare stretches of sand. Be sure to factor into your plans a day trip to the Tobago Cays aboard the *Friendship Rose*.
- **Island-Hopping Adventure** Start your journey in St Vincent and spend a few days on in the big island, then jump on a ferry and head to Bequia, where you'll be overwhelmed by the change of pace. After decompressing, loop back to St Vincent and catch the ferry south to Mustique, then onwards to Canouan, Mayreau, the Tobago Cays, Palm Island and finally to Union Island. Take as much time as you have – the slower the better.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate varies between the islands, as the Grenadines to the south are slightly drier and marginally warmer than St Vincent. In St Vincent the dry season runs approximately from January to May. In July, the wettest month, rain falls for an average of 26 days, while in April, the driest month, it averages only six days. In January the average daily high temperature is 29°C (85°F), while the nightly low is 22°C (72°F). In July the average high is 30°C (86°F), while the nightly low is 24°C (76°F).



The high season (winter) runs from December to April/May. The wetter months can still be nice, and they keep the islands lush and green.

## HISTORY

St Vincent is not as remote as it appears and has actually been inhabited for some 7000 years. Originally it was sparsely populated by the hunter-gatherer Siboneys. Around 2000 years ago they were replaced by the Arawaks, who moved up from present-day Venezuela. The raiding Caribs eventually took over from the Arawaks, but held some of the islands for as little as 100 years before the arrival of the heavily armed Spanish. Fierce Carib resistance kept the Europeans out of St Vincent